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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0379

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RUMIAAA/CDR USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL IMMEDIATE

RUEAHND/CDRJTFB SOTO CANO HO IMMEDIATE

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC IMMEDIATE

RULGPSU/COMSOC SOUTH IMMEDIATE

RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE

RUEIDN/DNI WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEGUCIGALPA 000724

SIPDIS

STATE FOR WHA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/10/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [HO](#)

SUBJECT: TFH01: AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH PRESIDENTIAL
CANDIDATE ELVIN SANTOS

REF: TEGUCIGALPA 706

Classified By: Ambassador Hugo Llorens, reasons 1.4 (b & d)

¶1. (C) Summary: The Ambassador hosted an August 7 meeting with Liberal Party presidential nominee Elvin Santos. Santos expressed support for the Arias mediation saying it was good for the country and also for his own political interests, since it would hopefully lead to some measure of reconciliation between the Liberals. However, he expressed the prevailing fear that Zelaya would not comply with the terms of an agreement and urged that strong enforcement and verification mechanisms be established to deter and contain Zelaya. Santos is planning to visit Washington August 26-28. End Summary.

¶2. (C) The Ambassador outlined the U.S. position that the San Jose Accord is the best manner to restore the democratic order. He encouraged Santos to use his influence to encourage de facto President Roberto Micheletti to support President Arias' mediation effort. The Ambassador also mentioned that he understood that there were concerns on whether the agreement would be faithfully implemented and suggested that Hondurans contribute ideas on strengthening the verification side of the agreement. Santos responded that he had almost no contact with Micheletti since the coup and little or no influence. Santos did say there would need to be some type of congressional oversight mechanism.

¶3. (C) Santos remains confident that he can win the election in November, despite falling behind in the polls since June ¶28. He noted that his main rival, National Party contender Porfirio "Pepe" Lobo, had not gained ground, which suggests the weakness of his candidacy. Santos believes he runs best from behind, is accustomed to uphill battles and expressed the conviction that in the end Liberals would come together, rally to his candidacy, and give him a victory. He has already developed a political platform to use when the campaign formally begins in September. Santos does not think he can win in Tegucigalpa but feels he can win in Cortes (which includes Honduras' second largest city, San Pedro Sula), Atlantida, and other key departments. He believes he must win the support of mayors, including those disaffected by the forced removal of Zelaya. He devoted most of the week visiting five Departments, meeting with Liberal mayors and

getting their support behind his candidacy.

¶4. (C) Santos believes that in order to unite the Liberal Party, he must achieve a political accord with Zelaya, and says he is working toward that end. Santos's relationship with de facto regime president and fellow Liberal Roberto Micheletti, on the other hand, is currently strained. Micheletti has been removing not only Zelaya loyalists from government, but also supporters of Santos.

¶5. (C) The Ambassador stressed that for both Micheletti and Zelaya, the best path is a negotiated solution. That is the path that will lead to prominence for both men; and will allow the next President of Honduras to take over with the full support of the international community. Santos agreed, and while recognizing the "no contact" policy, asked the Ambassador to find a way (or an intermediary) to share these views with Micheletti.

¶6. (C) The Ambassador conveyed that the San Jose Accord was the best path forward, and failure to achieve an accord would result in increasing strains with the international community. He noted that MERCOSUR and Spain have announced that they will not recognize elections held by the de facto regime. Santos said that for Honduras, the key actor in the international community will be the United States, and he is confident that they can find small, symbolic ways, over time, to restore the relationship (e.g. joint narco-trafficking operations). The Ambassador said that the United States does not want to damage long-term relations with Honduras, and reiterated that a negotiated solution that restores the democratic order and President Zelaya is the best way out for

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all parties involved.

¶7. (C) Comment: Santos was optimistic, despite his current position in the polls and the polarization of the Liberal party. It remains in his best interest for all of the factions in the Liberal party to unite soon, and the San Jose Accord is the best mechanism for that to happen. End Comment.
LLORENS